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## Prelude

Performing Theology, Forming Identity and Shaping Experience:

Christian Congregational Music in Europe and North America

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Congregational music-making has long been a vital and vibrant practice within Christian communities worldwide. Congregational music comes into being in public and private acts of worship, shaping participant identities and enabling powerful, transformational experiences. It reflects, informs and articulates religious belief even as it creates sonic space for differences in interpretation. Performing shared repertoires of music can unify communities of faith across geographical and cultural boundaries; conversely, it can re-inscribe or challenge particular regional, class or denominational identities. While Christian congregational music-making and the varying songs, styles and performance practices it encompasses are found the world over, the experiences it engenders are indelibly stamped with the particular.

*Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity and Experience* is an edited volume whose chapters explore the many roles that Christian congregational music plays, focusing primarily on Christian communities located in present-day Europe and North America. Many of the chapters of this book originated as papers or keynote presentations at the first meeting of the international and interdisciplinary conference *Christian Congregational Music: Local and Global Perspectives*, held in the autumn of 2011 at Ripon College Cuddesdon, Oxford. The book draws on perspectives from across academic disciplines in order to illuminate the ways in which music-making in and by congregations reflects and shapes the performance of theology, the interplay of identities and religious experience. The co-editors of this volume – as

ethnomusicologists whose work encompasses religion – have chosen this set of inter-related themes because they are key issues within contemporary scholarship and crucial to understanding the diverse practices of Christian music-making. We believe that broadening our theoretical and methodological horizons and seeking to contribute to these timely scholarly discourses points a way forward for future congregational music scholarship.

In order to explore these themes, contributors provide ethnographic and historical case studies, analytical perspectives and theological ruminations on congregational music in Christian communities, both historically and in the contemporary moment. The plurality of approaches represented in this volume, we hope, represents the future of congregational music scholarship: one situated in particular disciplines and perspectives but open to the insights of others and in dialogue with scholars of Christian music working across geographical and cultural space.

In this brief introduction, we will first explore the nuances of the category ‘Christian congregational music’, explaining why we believe this to be a helpful term for further scholarly engagement of Christian music-making. We then situate each of the chapters within the three subtopics of the volume – *Performing Theology*, *Interplay of Identities*, and *Experience and Embodiment* – in terms of the broader interdisciplinary concerns of recent musical and religious studies scholarship.

### **Defining ‘Christian Congregational Music’**

Finding a category in which to place the various forms, styles and repertoires integral to the musical life of Christian congregations is not a straightforward task; a number of terms, including ‘hymnody’, ‘sacred music’, ‘worship music’ and ‘congregational song’ have been used as overarching categories to describe this vast repertoire. For this

volume we have chosen the term ‘Christian congregational music’, by which we mean any and all music performed in or as worship by a gathered community that considers itself to be Christian. Often this music spills outside the boundaries of the formal church service into private use or civic ceremony, but what unites the disparate musics under this umbrella are their potential for use in formative corporate acts of worship.

‘Christian hymnody’ is a closely related term frequently employed for the same or similar purposes. In much academic usage, and in the more generic sense of the term, ‘hymnody’ refers to a song repertoire used in corporate worship of a deity. While this general and academic definition would indeed fit the music discussed in the majority of the chapters in this volume, when situated within many contemporary Christian contexts, ‘hymnody’ has a much more partial meaning. Academic commentators, conservators of musical ‘tradition’ and congregation members alike often contrast ‘hymns’, by which they refer to a wide range of musical styles defined or perceived to be ‘traditional’, to newly composed ‘contemporary’ songs, often set to popular music styles, whose names range from ‘praise choruses’ to ‘worship songs’. While widely used to describe music in congregational worship, the binary of ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ often obscures more than it illumines because these terms can refer to vastly differing styles and repertoires depending on the context.<sup>1</sup> Because the

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of the relationship between hymns and contemporary worship songs and the traditional-contemporary discourse, see Birgitta J. Johnson, “‘Oh, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing’: Music and Worship in Black Megachurches of Los Angeles, California” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles 2008) and ‘Back to the Heart of Worship: Praise and Worship Music in a Los Angeles African American Megachurch’, *Black Music Research Journal* 31/1 (2011), pp. 105-129; Monique M. Ingalls, ‘Awesome in This Place: Sound, Space and Identity in Contemporary North American Evangelical Worship’ (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania 2008); Anna E. Nekola, ‘Between This World and the Next: The Musical “Worship Wars” and Evangelical Ideology in the United States 1960-2005’ (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009); Deborah Smith Pollard, *When the Church*

incorporation of expressions both old and new is crucial for any Christian music-making, we wish to side-step the entrenched associations and the evocation of the traditional/contemporary binary that the term ‘hymnody’ brings with it. Though some chapters in this volume elect to use ‘hymns’ and ‘hymnody’ to frame their topics, we have elected to use the broader umbrella term ‘congregational music’ to broaden the scope of musical exploration and to avoid needless confusion as to our subject matter.

We have chosen the category ‘congregational music’ rather than ‘congregational song’ for two related reasons: to highlight the important role of instruments within many Christian traditions, and to acknowledge improvisatory traditions in which music-making does not necessarily draw from or result in a fixed musical ‘text’. Song has long been the privileged musical expression in Christian worship, for a variety of practical and ideological reasons related to the association of ‘presence’ with the human voice.<sup>2</sup> We chose ‘music’ in recognition that instrumental music, while often subservient to

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*Becomes Your Party: Contemporary Gospel Music* (Wayne State University Press, 2008); Jonathan Dueck, ‘Binding and Loosing in Song: Conflict, Identity, and Canadian Mennonite Music’, *Ethnomusicology*, 55/2 (27 May 2011): pp. 229-254.

<sup>2</sup> The human voice has long been understood within both Western philosophy and Christian theology as an unmediated representation of being; instruments, by contrast, have often been seen as artificial technologies because they involve a degree of separation from the body. Amanda Weidman calls attention to and problematizes the presumed ‘naturalness’ of the human voice, showing instead the ways the voice is discursively constructed, both materially and metaphorically. For an overview of how the human voice has been conceived within a variety of academic and musical practitioner perspectives, see Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Post-Colonial Politics of Music in South India* (Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 1-24. For parallel explorations of why the use of musical instruments is contested within Islam and Judaism, respectively, see L.I. Al Faruqi, ‘Music, Musicians and Muslim Law’, *Asian Music*, 17/1 (1985): pp. 3-36; and J.A. Levine, ‘Judaism and Music’, in Guy L. Beck (ed.), *Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music in World Religions*, (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2006), pp. 29-59.

vocal song, is an evocative and necessary component of many Christian worship traditions, sometimes stepping out of its accompanying role and driving powerful spiritual experiences. Further, the broader term music also emphasizes the ephemerality of sonic performances in which there is not a clear script, creating space for the many Christian traditions around the world in which musical improvisation occurs within or among pre-composed pieces.

### **Performing Theology**

Many scholarly works have objectified Christian congregational music as a ‘text’ – an object with a fixed form that is believed to carry inherent meaning for the scholar to ‘decode’ regardless of the varying contexts of its performance. Recent musicological work has shown this model to be reductionist, arguing that musical meaning is constructed in and through performance and moving toward the model that explores ‘musicking’ as a social practice, activity or performance.<sup>3</sup> An examination how belief is performed through ‘musicking’ intersects in interesting ways with recent formulations of ‘lived religion’.<sup>4</sup> Contrasting to ‘official’ forms of religion promoted by institutions, ‘lived religion’ is not ‘fixed, unitary, or even particularly coherent’,<sup>5</sup> and instead is often ambivalent and subject to a variety of meanings. Congregational music often operates at

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<sup>3</sup> See especially Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Wesleyan University Press, 1998); John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (University of Washington Press, 1973); and Nicholas Cook, ‘We’re All Ethnomusicologists Now’ in Henry Stobart (ed.), *The New (Ethno)Musicologies* (Scarecrow, 2008), pp. 48-70.

<sup>4</sup> See Nancy T. Ammerman (ed.), *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (University Press, 2006); David D. Hall (ed.), *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton University Press, 1997); and Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> McGuire, *Lived Religion*, p. 185.

the nexus between official and ‘lived’ Christian theologies, acting variously and unevenly as a source of indoctrination or challenge, complicity or contest.

Each chapter in the *Performing Theology* section shows how congregational music-making is an important way in which theological and other meanings are performed through the interplay of the musical creators’ intentions, performance contexts, previous associations inhering to music style and various situated meanings of song texts. Will Boone’s chapter speaks to the role of musical performance as a temporal event that brings together past, present and future. At Faith Assembly Christian Center in Durham, North Carolina, worship enables participants to bring together through performance both collective and personal memories of traumas past with hope for the future in an experiential present.

Deborah Smith Pollard’s exploration of the rise of ‘Praise and Worship’ in Detroit area churches also shows how the performance of worship in contemporary African American churches expresses a common past of both subjugation and triumph. Smith Pollard demonstrates the wide range of historical and geographical influences – from the post-emancipation lining out tradition to the reclamation of Old Testament Hebrew terms for worship – through which African American worshippers understand ‘worship’ and interpret their musical performances. Both Boone’s and Smith Pollard’s chapters show how the concepts of ‘new’ are invariable rooted in the ‘old’: even in creating the future, participants imagine the past through their performance. In musical performance, then, multiple histories are brought together in a meaningful experience of times, people and places.

Boone’s and Smith Pollard’s studies of performed musical theologies are followed by theological reflections on musical performance from two Anglican

theologians. Because congregational music is one of the most important factors in shaping religious experience, June Boyce-Tillman calls on the practitioners of church music – particularly the people who choose and lead the music – to be more aware of the various components of the holistic experience of music-making. Boyce-Tillman also calls church leaders and practitioners to a greater interdisciplinary awareness; for her, various musicological disciplines, including ethnomusicology, historical musicology and music psychology, each offer important insights into the musical experience. Her chapter suggests that it is only by bringing these together that churches can provide space for meaningful musical experience among their congregants.

As several chapters in this section attest, to understand how many Christian groups perform theology it is important to pay attention to forms of Christian music-making that are improvised, or ‘created in the course of performance’.<sup>6</sup> In his reflection on the character of worship in the Church of England, Anglican theologian Martyn Percy suggests that Anglicanism can be compared to jazz – particularly Brazilian *bossa nova* – in terms of its incomplete character subtly evolving in the act of performance. While recognizing the diversity of ways to perform theology, both Percy and Boyce-Tillman argue that Christian liturgy must include not only pre-scripted performance, but also improvisational elements in order to reflect the complexity of human experience and the in-breaking activity of God.

### **Interplay of Identities**

Music-making is an important means of individual and group identity formation: people use music to identify with or against certain groups, to create new identities and to

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<sup>6</sup> Bruno Nettl, ‘Introduction: An Art Neglected in Scholarship’, in Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell (eds), *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 1.



maintain or challenging existing identities.<sup>7</sup> Identity is performative; that is, it is not a static or essential category, but rather is (re-)produced through repeated actions, including music-making as a part of public ritual performances,<sup>8</sup> as well as more personal ‘performances’ of daily life.<sup>9</sup> Music often serves a central role in processes of identification within religious communities because collective music-making allows for the negotiation of religious identities in dialogue with those of race/ethnicity,<sup>10</sup> national and regional affiliations,<sup>11</sup> generational difference<sup>12</sup> and denominational or parachurch affiliations.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Simon Frith, ‘Music and Identity’, in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (Sage, 1996), pp. 108-27.

<sup>8</sup> For approaches to the interface of music and religious ritual within musical scholarship, see Steven Friedson, *Remains of Ritual: Northern Gods in a Southern Land* (University of Chicago Press, 2009); Carol Muller, *Rituals of Fertility and the Sacrifice of Desire: Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa* (University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Deborah Wong, *Sounding the Center: History and Aesthetics in Thai Buddhist Performance* (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> For approaches to music in everyday life, see Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Simon Frith, ‘Music and Everyday Life’, *Critical Quarterly*, 44/ 1 (April 2002), pp. 35-48.

<sup>10</sup> See Melvin Butler, ‘The Weapons of Our Warfare: Music, Positionality, and Transcendence Among Haitian Pentecostals’, *Caribbean Studies*, 36/2 (2008): pp. 23-64; Judah Cohen, ‘Hip-Hop Judaica: The Politics of Representin’ Heebster Heritage’, *Popular Music*, 28/1 (2009): pp. 1-18; Deborah A. Kapchan, ‘Singing Community/Remembering in Common: Sufi Liturgy and North African Identity in Southern France’, *International Journal of Community Music*, 2/1 (2009): pp. 9-23; and Gerardo Marti, *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> See Melvin Butler, “‘Nou Kwe nan Sentespri’/‘We Believe in the Holy Spirit’: Music, Ecstasy, and Identity in Haitian Pentecostal Worship’, *Black Music Research Journal*, 22/1 (Spring 2002): pp. 85-125; and Timothy Rommen, ‘Protestant Vibrations? Reggae, Rastafari, and Conscious Evangelicals’, *Popular Music*, 25/2 (2006): pp. 235-263.

<sup>12</sup> See Carolyn Landau, ‘Music Consumption and the Navigation of Identities: Transnational Moroccan Youth in Britain’, in Khalaf and Khalaf (eds.), *Arab Youth: Social Mobilization in Times of Risk* (Saqi Books, 2011), pp. 337-

The *Interplay of Identities* section emphasizes the dynamic relationships between the varieties of identifications available to Christian congregations; many of the chapters foreground the increasingly important role of musical media in negotiating these relationships. Each chapter in this section demonstrates that congregational singing always embeds an understanding of Christian religious identity within senses of regional, national, ethnic, generational or (trans)denominational belonging, and that the relationship between these modes of identification is always in the process of negotiation.

Jonathan Dueck's chapter foregrounds the interplay between ethnic, denominational and diasporic identities in exploring a musical 'artefact' from the Mennonite diaspora in North America. Pushing against reified notions of 'culture' and 'identity', Dueck shows instead how the feelingful and experiential power of music-making, conjured by artefacts of performance, is an important means by which complex musical and religious subjects are formed. In her chapter, Kinga Povedák highlights a similarly multifaceted set of negotiations within Catholic congregational music-making in socialist and post-socialist-era Hungary. As Povedák's chapter shows, a complex combination of aesthetic, religious and political factors have shaped the reception and use of transnational vernacular styles within Hungarian Catholic congregations. In the

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358; Daniel B. Reed, "'The Ge Is in the Church' and 'Our Parents Are Playing Muslim': Performance, Identity, and Resistance among the Dan in Postcolonial Côte d'Ivoire", *Ethnomusicology*, 49/3 (Fall 2005): pp. 347-367; Smith Pollard, *When the Church Becomes Your Party*.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Dueck, 'Binding and Loosing in Song: Conflict, Identity, and Canadian Mennonite Music', *Ethnomusicology*, 55/2 (27 May 2011): pp. 229-254; Monique M. Ingalls, 'Singing Praise in the Streets: Performing Canadian Christianity through Public Worship in Toronto's Jesus in the City Parade', *Culture and Religion*, 13/3 (2012): pp. 349-371; Jeffrey A. Summit, *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land': Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship* (Oxford University Press, 2000); Johnson, "'Oh, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing'".

wake of the Second Vatican Council's imperative to localise music and liturgy, musical style has become a source of contention through which worshippers construct – then identify with or against – the 'traditional' and the 'modern'.

Both Dueck's and Povedák's chapters point to ways in which church networks and transnational media industries have influenced local congregational music-making. The two remaining chapters in this section each address the role of media more directly, highlighting the ways in which mass mediated sounds and images enable listeners to take on new 'local' and 'global' affiliations, whether as 'worshippers' or members of a global religious imaginary.<sup>14</sup> In an era in which mass media and migration are ever increasing the speed at which cultural elements move within and across social groups,<sup>15</sup> congregations and individual worshippers around the world have unprecedented access to mass media; as a result, new congregational styles and songs are spread through commercial and social media more quickly than ever before. Congregations use mass media congregational music styles in processes of identity negotiation in a variety of ways: some reject and define themselves against certain styles, others perform transnational congregational song genres to claim a place within larger Christian movements or publics, and still others adopt nonlocal musical styles to in an attempt to transcend the problems of their local contexts.

Anna Nekola's analysis of the marketing of American Christian worship music highlights well the role of media in bringing together 'the technological sublime and the

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<sup>14</sup> For further discussion of the interface between religion and globalization, see Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); Thomas J. Csordas (ed.), *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization* (University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (Routledge, 1996).

religious sublime', enabling consumers to be transformed in their interpersonal relationship with a living God and transported into a place of divine encounter. Nekola demonstrates how advertisements in the U.S. Christian media industry propagate certain ideas of how to worship, arguing that the circulation of these images have reflected and contributed to the privatization of religious experience.

It is likely that many of the worshippers Nekola describes would be listening to the musical subjects of Gesa Hartje's chapter: the Australian modern worship band Hillsong United. Anthropologist Birgit Meyer, in her work with Pentecostal media, has noted ways in which religious identity is embodied and mediated through what she terms 'aesthetic formations'.<sup>16</sup> In order to 'have religious messages experienced as true ... and experienced as real', Meyer writes, translocal religious imagined communities 'must become tangible by materializing in spaces and objects, and by being embodied in subjects'.<sup>17</sup> Gesa Hartje's chapter addresses this process, showing how Hillsong's mediated and live performances of worship, and the shared experience of concert attendees and listeners, creates an 'imagined community'<sup>18</sup> of fan-worshippers united by a common musical language. Both Hartje's and Nekola's chapters demonstrate how the use of mass media technologies in public and private settings has influenced the ways in which personal and collective Christian identities are formed and mediated; further,

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<sup>16</sup> Birgit Meyer, 'Introduction: From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms and Styles of Bonding', in Birgit Meyer (ed.), *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1-30.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed., (Verso Books, 1983/2006).

these technologies have enabled the images of worship circulating through global media to become embodied in new contexts.

### **Experience and Embodiment**

Discussions of mediation and embodiment within the *Interplay of Identities* section set the stage for the book's third and final thematic focus: *Experience and Embodiment*. Religious experience is comprised of moments that are both extraordinary and mundane; it encompasses both singular rituals and the practices of everyday life. Exploring congregational music as a locus of religious experience can provide insight into the human religious impulse: in particular, the ways that individual and collective performances shape belief and create identity at the site of these powerful musical experiences. Music is particularly crucial to consider in any conversation about Christian religious experience because it is so central to corporate and private worship across a wide spectrum of liturgical forms.

Rather than remaining separate from or subordinate to belief, experience – and the powerful emotions it involves – is integral to embodying it. In his work on gospel in African American congregations, ethnographer Glenn Hinson has noted the interlocking of experience, knowledge and belief within what he calls the circle of faith, in which 'experience grants knowledge, knowledge informs belief; belief invites further experience'.<sup>19</sup> Hinson's circle is clearly at work in Sarah Eyerly's chapter on eighteenth-century Moravian ritual and experience. According to Eyerly, 'For the Moravians, sensual experience of Christ's suffering was a necessary component of theological learning. And music, with its ability to elicit emotion, was particularly

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<sup>19</sup> Glenn Hinson, *Fire in My Bones: Transcendence and the Holy Spirit in African American Gospel* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 11.

useful in guiding comprehension of theology “through the heart”.’ For Moravians, as in many traditions around the world, participation in congregational music-making is one of the central collective activities that enables the creation and mediation of powerful religious experiences and the embodiment of belief.<sup>20</sup>

While some Christian traditions maintain and cultivate powerful ‘sensual experiences’, for others the emphasis on experience has receded. Liturgical scholar Martin Stringer suggests that in some contexts, Christian congregational music has become ‘muzak’, in other words, music in the background that is ‘safe’, innocuous and unobtrusive. Combining philosophical reflection with his personal experience in the life of various English churches, Stringer’s chapter engenders an important theological critique: he suggests what may be missing in many ‘comfortable’ contemporary contexts is a sense of danger, necessary for religious practice to reflect the varying experiences of life.

Yet while music as part of ritual is an important part of the sensual experience of embodying worship, it is only effective when the ‘work’ is done by the worshipper. Expectation and enculturation are integral parts of experience, and worshippers must be socialized into particular traditions in order to experience transcendence.<sup>21</sup> Yet, just as musical and religious experience often eludes description, so does the question of ‘how

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<sup>20</sup> Judith Becker, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing* (Indiana University Press, 2004); Melvin Butler, ‘Songs of Pentecost: Experiencing Music, Transcendence, and Identity in Jamaica and Haiti’ (PhD diss., New York University, 2005); Steven M. Friedson, *Dancing Prophets: Musical Experience in Tumbuka Healing* (University of Chicago Press, 1996). Benjamin D. Koen, *Beyond the Roof of the World: Music, Prayer, and Healing in the Pamir Mountains* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Becker, *Deep Listeners*; Mandi M. Miller and Kenneth T. Strongman, ‘The Emotional Effects of Music on Religious Experience: A Study of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Style of Music and Worship’, *Psychology of Music*, 30/1 (2002): pp. 8-27.

to get there'. This is the central quandary faced by Gordon Adnams' respondents in his contribution. Adnams' phenomenological study provides a richly-textured account of Canadian participants' experiences of worship during corporate singing in their churches. Adnams theorises the experiential state his consultants describe as 'really worshipping' as 'being-in-song', showing that the embodied transcendent experience is one in which the singer is involved in 'multi-layered interactions with and around music and word, content and context, attention and intent'.

One of the central paradoxes of musico-religious experience is that it is at once social and personal; further, these forms of experience often interweave elements considered 'sacred' and 'secular' together in complex and contradictory ways. Participants from differing backgrounds and perspectives may experience the same event very differently; the same is true of scholars of congregational music-making. Mark Porter's chapter, similar in approach and content to Adnams', focuses on the experience of musicians at a charismatic Anglican church in Oxford. In describing their experience of music and worship, these musicians' descriptions often defy separation of 'sacred' and 'secular', even as their remarks seek to re-inscribe these categories. Porter shows how each worshipper, while attending the same church, employs idiosyncratic strategies to smooth over the dissonances between the various musical worlds he or she inhabits both inside and outside of the church. Porter's account productively questions to what extent *simultaneous* experience may or may not equate to *shared* experience.

### **Conclusion: The Promise of Plural Approaches to Christian Congregational Musical Scholarship**

In highlighting the overlapping themes of performance, identity and experience, this volume presents congregational music-making as a *gestalt* in which mind, body,

emotions and spirit are inextricably linked – part of the larger experience of being human. We, the editors, hope that this volume is able to serve an example of the promise of plural perspectives in Christian congregational music scholarship. Envisioned as a polyphonic collection – with moments of consonance and dissonance – *Christian Congregational Music* seeks to model what we believe to be a crucial aspect missing from much scholarship on Christian congregational music: a multi-voiced dialogue between methodological approaches, disciplinary perspectives and the positioning of scholars in relationship to the communities they represent.

The volume's focus on fluid, dynamic aspects of music in and as performance calls for scholars and practitioners to use a range of analytical methods that extend beyond traditional analyses of music and lyrics. Participant-observation, analysis of visual media texts and interviews with musical creators and performers are some of the methods from which contributors draw to explore how congregational music-making performs theology, forms identity and shapes experience.

Similarly, the scholars contributing to this volume approach their topics from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, including phenomenology, sociology, psychology, theology, (ethno)musicology, media and culture studies. This rich variety of cross-disciplinary approaches results, we believe, in a helpfully broad perspective on many issues pertinent to scholars of Christian congregational music, as well as bringing useful insights to wider scholarship in each of these disciplines.

As well as bringing together numerous methodological and disciplinary perspectives, this volume also privileges scholarly voices from a variety of geographical and cultural perspectives. These include North America, Western and Eastern Europe and, as such, highlight both the similarities – and global interconnectedness – as well as



the regional differences that exist in the various issues at stake as well as how they are experienced and embodied in different contexts. The kinds of conversations that characterize the first section of this volume can be seen as a microcosm of the entire volume: on the one hand, it can be understood as a conversation between scholars and practitioners. In reading each account, however, it becomes difficult to find a clear delineation between who is a 'participant', 'observer' or 'practitioner': like their ethnographic consultants, each author in this section, and indeed the volume, negotiate multiple identities, performing them in part through the act of writing itself.<sup>22</sup>

Though there is much more work to be done, it is our hope that, through modeling collaboration across methods, disciplines and perspectives, this volume points the way forward for congregational music studies. Like Christian congregational music itself, it takes a plurality of voices to perform knowledge, shape understanding and bring identity into being. We therefore hope that you, the reader, will find perusing the pages of this volume a thought-provoking, enjoyable and ultimately inspirational experience.

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<sup>22</sup> James Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths', in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (University of California Press, 1989), pp. 1-26.

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